



**Meeting with the Wisconsin Towns Association (WTA)
Monday, July 12, 2004, 11:00-12:30pm**

People in attendance

WTA

Terry McMahon (President)
Marvin Samson (Vice President)
Rick Stadelman (Executive Director)
Tom Harnish (Director)
Lee Engelbrecht (Director)
Arlyn Helm (Director)
Robert Thomas (Director)
Arthur M. Riese (Director)

Eugene Lueck (Director)
Bud De Florian (Director)
Richard Gimler (Director)
Kevin Koth (Director)
Marilyn K. Bhend (Director)
Jolene Plautz (Lobbyist)
Kent Woods (Lobbyist)

Wisconsin DOT

Casey Newman
Doug Dalton
Arun Rao

- 1) Overview of WisDOT's meeting purpose and WisDOT's long-range plan, Connections 2030, by WisDOT staff: The meeting began at 11:00. Casey Newman, WisDOT, gave an overview of WisDOT's long-range plan, Connections 2030. WisDOT is seeking input on transportation planning issues from various stakeholder groups. Connections 2030 is scheduled to be completed in 2006.
- 2) Gathering of input from the Wisconsin Towns Association: Discussion focused on the following issues:
 - a. Changes in Rural Wisconsin resulting in new Transportation needs
The Towns association emphasized that much is changing in rural Wisconsin, and this change has an impact on the road system. Three sectors of that impact in rural areas were emphasized; agriculture, forestry, and tourism. A major issue for the towns is how do we maintain a local road system that can sustain these industries?
 - In agriculture, there are bigger farms and larger land holdings that lead to bigger heavier vehicles serving those farms, and local roads need to change to accommodate this.
 - In forestry, weights and dimensions of trucks heading for the mills are causing strain on local roads and bridges.

- In tourism, the season is now year-round, and roads now need to be plowed and maintained that haven't been in the past.

Attendees remarked that local roads are inadequate to handle these changes. For example, local roads do not have a wide enough shoulder (to allow agricultural machinery to be passed safely). The current situation on many local roads is dangerous. There are large semi-trucks carrying grain and milk that weren't there before. Other points mentioned include:

- Tractors/trucks destroy road shoulders
- In some parts of the state horse and buggies damage blacktop, and the buggies are not licensed

Members noted the increase in semi traffic. One member pointed to the example of the projected increase in semis on 18/151 and doubted whether 18/151 can handle the increase in 2030 since it appears that it can't handle the traffic now. He felt that installing auxiliary lanes to allow safer merging would help.

b. Funding and Bonding Issues

Members asked WisDOT to make sure that all transportation users pay their fare share in user fees (including trucks).

Members also expressed concern on how the move from long-term to short-term bonding affects local roads, and its potential for meeting the needs of these roads.

c. Preservation vs. New Construction

The Towns Association believes there is too much money spent on new highways and not enough on preservation. Members pointed out that they agreed with WisDOT's connector system (Corridors 2020), but pointed out that is putting pressure on providing maximum weight access on the local system. A priority must be put on maintaining existing state and local system.

d. Bypasses

One member remarked that WisDOT's bypasses have an impact on the core community in that businesses no longer have traffic for sustaining business and there is a rush by cities to annex the corridor along bypasses for development. The member suggested that we should improve highways but look at methods to keep some traffic going through the town because of the effects on core development. The member also recommended we look at the annexation issue when we plan bypasses, and that we need better recognition on how bypasses are used to endorse the annexation policies of cities and villages (to the detriment of the towns).

e. Rail

There was a brief discussion of freight rail vs. truck rail. Some members noted that in most cases, truck is cheaper than rail depending on how many rail spurs are needed. Rail is not providing timely service required by firms. One member noted that they don't have the infrastructure to support more freight rail and that rail would not support itself and is unrealistic. He remarked that the notion that freight rail will spur economic development is not going to happen, and you need many industries on a line to sustain the rail infrastructure cost.

f. Rural area transportation system limitations:

- Bridges are the worst limitation. One member suggested we look into a statewide bridge program (for smaller local bridges) and noted that towns are not getting enough aid money to replace their bridges.
- Another limiting factor is that towns don't have the local roads to handle expansion.

g. Access

Another issue is the limited access along highways. Most town roads are closed off, so for local traffic such as school buses, ambulances, and farmers, access can be problematic. On Hwy. 18/151 there is no interchange to get on highway from many areas now (Hwy 29 was also cited as an example). It takes 10 minutes for one attendee to get on the road. The 4-lane highway is not meant for local citizens, as they can hardly use it.

h. Safety

Some members remarked that the highway safety program statewide seems to be counter-productive and that a better process for the identification of unsafe roads is needed (are all of the safety problems not identified because of the huge need it would reveal?). Unsafe roads are not being identified because the state would be liable if it didn't fix the identified roads. One member stated that safety should be the number one priority. He recommended we look at alternatives other states have implemented with control of semis.

i. Interrelationships between all modes of transportation

Members remarked there are inadequate connections between different modes of transportation, and that the department is failing in terms of intermodal connections.

Members would like to see the creation of economic hub terminals for trucks.

j. Aging Population

The Towns Association stated that rural transit is very effective when done correctly (example: Neilsville shared ride taxi), and that it is useful for both the old and the young.

Issues regarding the aging population mentioned include highway use, auto use, and the elderly driving in conditions different from when they learned to drive. The towns association would like to see safer roads and transit to deal with this issue, but noted that towns are not in the position to provide public transportation.

k. Education/School

The Towns Association noted that the distance to schools is getting longer. Current projections indicate a reduction of school age children across the state, especially in rural areas. These changes will likely lead to district consolidation and already long trips to school will get longer (an example of an existing 45 minute one-way trip in northern WI was cited). Adequate transportation for education is an emerging issue that should be addressed.

l. Tourism

Attendees suggested that Wisconsin look more at what other states are doing with regards to tourism, and for suggestions for the long-range plan. Example: Have an area like in Vermont where we don't have intensive commercial development (Wal-Marts, etc.). Members remarked that the current system plays to Illinois tourism traffic all over the state. The Towns Association would like to see WisDOT be more aggressive in promoting Rustic Roads, since they help tourism and protect/preserve local roads.

m. Road Construction Methods

One member suggested that Wisconsin examine the way roads are built in the state. In Europe, they use concrete underlay with base on top of it. While there is a larger up front investment, the life of the European roads is 2 to 3 times longer than the life of our roads, and maintenance costs are much less.